

MAGONIA Supplement

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KEYHOE AND THE 'MODEST SURGE' OF 1950

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NOW WE GIVE evidence for probably the funniest paradox of the theory that flaps are caused by media, introduced by a quote we take from Philip Klass's *UFO Explained* (Vintage, 1974, p. 322.)

...during the five-year period from 1947 to 1951, the number of UFO reports submitted to the USAF averaged fewer than *fifteen* per month. This included a modest surge during 1950 when Donald Keyhoe, the principal early publicizer of the extraterrestrial hypothesis, published his first UFO book, filled with extravagant claims and charges of a

high-level government conspiracy to withhold the "truth from the public." [his italics, as usual]

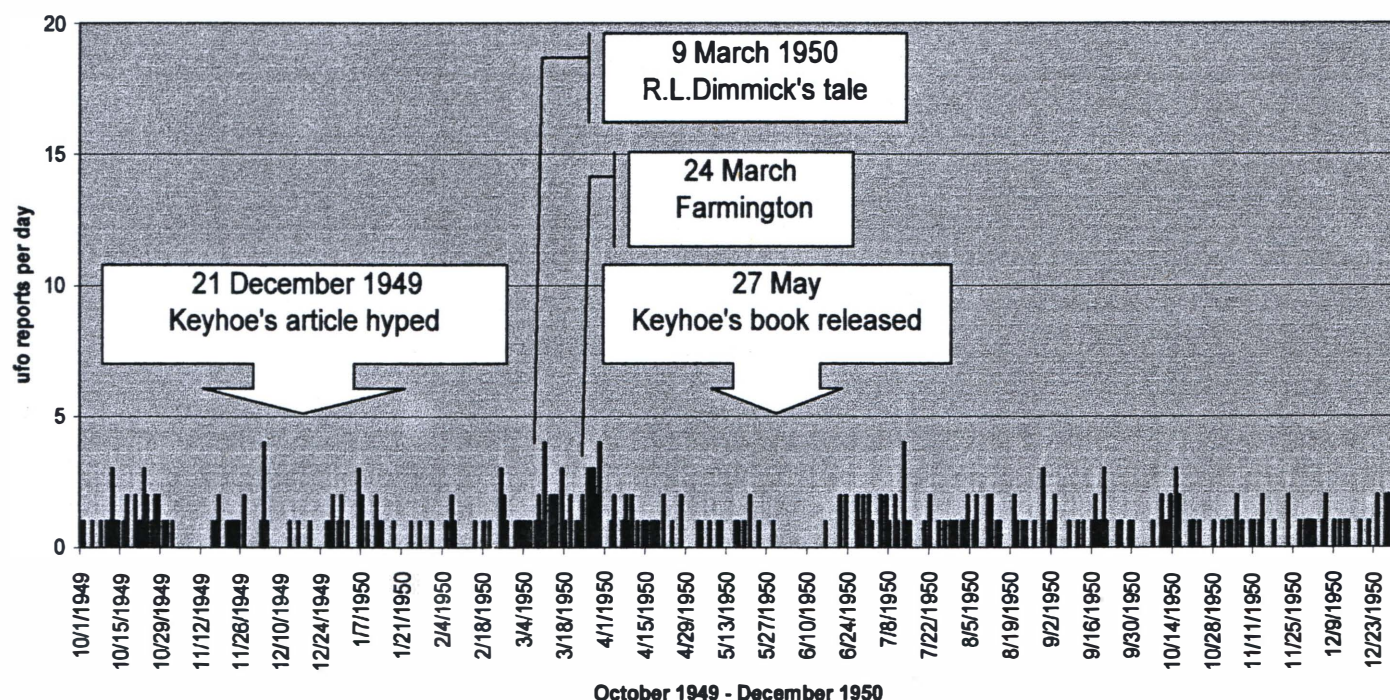
The book had its first test market release in Midwest bookstores on 27 May and had general release on 5 June. (Loren Gross, *UFOs: A History: 1950: April - July*, p. 51)

What leaps out at you when you look at the Blue Book numbers of 1950 is that May and June are actually the two lightest months of that year. This is even less than that magically small average of the 1947-51 period - *fifteen*.

1950 Blue Book tally by month

Jan	15
Feb	13
Mar	41
Apr	17
May	8
Jun	9
Jul	21
Aug	21
Sep	19
Oct	17
Nov	14
Dec	15

Why is there NO Flap Here?



Uh-oh, this looks bad, you think. But then you remember that Keyhoe's book was actually just a fleshing out of an article he did for *True* magazine several months earlier. It was the article that was the big sensation. UFO historian David Jacobs, in fact, said of it:

This issue of *True* was the most widely sold and read in the magazine's history. Indeed, it was one of the most widely read and discussed articles in publishing history.

(*The UFO Controversy in America* Indiana University Press, 1975/ Signet, September 1976, pp. 49-50)

Loren Gross's account of the article's release concurs it generated great excitement. Frank Edwards got an early copy of the article on 21 December 1949 and was so impressed, he leaned on *True*'s editor to let him break the story, despite a prior agreement with Walter Winchell letting him be first. Edwards's broadcast generated enough interest to lead to an Associated Press article the following afternoon. On the 24th the magazine hit the streets and Winchell plugged it on his broadcast. This gave the article international attention and an aura of journalistic acceptance rarely given the subject. (Loren Gross *UFOs: A History: Volume 2: 1949*, pp. 63-4)

Yet, the report numbers for January and February similarly fail to rise above *fifteen*. It isn't until March that the 'modest surge' appears. It may be tempting to blame this on seasonal factors. December and January are typically light months for UFO activity presumably because of the cold and cloudiness. But then we are back to why there was no reaction to the release of the book in June as reading Klass would lead you to expect.

Curtis Peebles notes that *True* followed up Keyhoe's article with a second article in their March issue penned by Commander R.B. McLaughlin, the former commander of White Sands Proving Ground. He recounted a 24 April 1949 incident that he was convinced was a flying saucer from another planet piloted by animate intelligent beings. His claim ends up reading:

The twin articles sparked a wave of publicity and sightings during early

1950. (*Watch the Skies*, Smithsonian Institution, 1994, p. 44)

The most spectacular case of this period was the Farmington, New Mexico incident of 17 March 1950 where thousands of saucers were seen by inhabitants. It was eventually blamed on fragments of a burst and frozen Skyhook balloon. In the next paragraph, however, the twin articles became a trio. In the April issue, "mailed in late March" Peebles adds, the magazine carried seven photos of flying saucers, albeit their quality was self-evidently low.

By the end of spring 1950, flying saucers had received several months of steady publicity in the wake of the Keyhoe article. (ibid., p. 44)

All very informative, but the puzzle is why reports are concentrated in March and by the end of the spring numbers are dropping. Only MacLaughlin's piece is set close to the start of the March surge. Why do the other two articles fail to create individual surges of their own. Worse, MacLaughlin's article is the least exciting of the three. Still worse, the biggest story about flying saucers in March had nothing to do with McLaughlin.

On 9 March 1950, R.L. Dimmick's tale of seeing a 23 inch long corpse taken from a crashed saucer around Mexico City hit the scene. As Loren Gross tells it:

Teletypes sent the story across the nation. Radio stations filled the airwaves. This triggered scores of requests for more information about the alleged amazing event. The *Chicago Tribune* complained its phone lines became tied into knots. The Pentagon came under siege by newsmen seeking details but the annoyed High Command professed ignorance...

(*UFOs: A History: 1950: January - March* pp. 37-8)

Time magazine, in its 17 April 1950 issue, was driven to comment on the frenzy Dimmick stirred up with his story, confirming it as the prominent story of this period. When you place R.L. Dimmick's tale on the time chart, it looks ideal to be the likely cause of the March surge. This solution has its own

interesting aspects. Dimmick's tale was basically confessed as a hoax and has no defenders these days. Yet this false tale generates a minor flap of reports that includes a notorious case, Farmington, defended by sixties UFO icon James McDonald and still accepted as mysterious by certain ufologists.

I automatically sympathise with those who feel this is all quite counterintuitive. How could Keyhoe's writings, whose seminal importance and popularity is accepted by all, not have created an important flap? Why, in fact, do the numbers seem to go down in the days after their first release? How could the Dimmick tale, whose present-day obscurity is well-deserved, have caused this 'modest surge'? Yet that is what the evidence points to. A funny paradox, indeed, if you think media attention is the critical factor in the creation of UFO flaps.

EDITORIAL

For many UFO enthusiasts, one of their chief frustrations is that mainstream science does not take them seriously. One would think that the best solution to this problem would be to make their research methods and theorising rigorously logical and scientific. But no, the favoured procedure is to denounce the more outrageous ufologists, who tour the crazy conferences, telling delighted audiences what they obviously want to hear, and giving their backing to those who seem slightly less crazy, if only because they are slightly less flamboyant. That these "scientific" ufologists are not really sincere in their stated desire for objectivity always becomes obvious as they react with rage to any attempts to subject their favourite UFO cases, or the theories of their favourite fellow ufologists, to critical examination.

LITERARY CRITICISM

John Harney gets infuriatingly supercilious about a recent addition to the UFO abduction literature

Budd Hopkins and Carol Rainey, *Sight Unseen: Science, UFO Invisibility and Transgenic Beings*, Atria Books, New York, 2003



There are several reasons why the work of Budd Hopkins attracts criticism and the principal one is the fact that he evidently regards abduction narratives as being true accounts of real, physical events. In his book on the Linda Napolitano abduction case, this led to all manner of absurdities, including the then secretary-general of the United Nations being asked some very silly questions. This new book is just as crazy, even though his wife, Carol Rainey, has attempted to give it a veneer of respectability by giving snippets of information about developments in applied science and arguing that the fantastic details of UFO abduction stories are not in conflict with basic scientific principles.

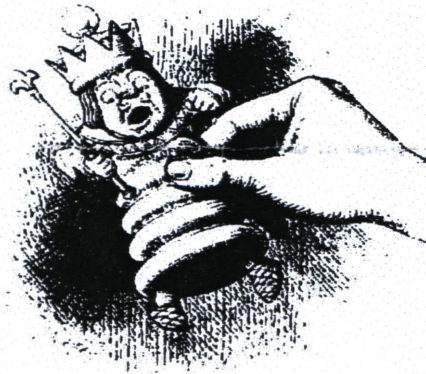
Hopkins insists that UFO encounter reports are not the results of hallucinations, sleep paralysis, or hoaxes. "The skilled UFO researcher has learned how to identify such mundane explanations, thus avoiding pursuit of any vague, dubious, and unsupported accounts." The main problem here is that the abductees get to know what Hopkins expects of them. If he considers their cases important they are repeatedly questioned, as well as some of them attending his abductee support group.

We are told that: "Out of the mass of credible reports that remain, the supporting physical, medical and photographic evidence is so consistent that *none* of the debunkers' psychological or psychosocial theories can begin to explain it away. Over the years, for better or for worse, I have come to believe that UFO abductions are real, event-level occurrences." Of course, physical, medical and photographic evidence does exist in connection with many of these stories, but, as Hopkins carefully avoids pointing out, there are always mundane explanations which can be considered to account for such evidence.

What appears to be a new departure

for Hopkins is his discussion of extraordinary accounts, which do not fit in with the rather stereotyped abduction narrative which he has developed in co-operation with David Jacobs and a few other investigators. This time he gives us some stories reminiscent of John Keel's *The Mothman Prophecies*. He doesn't mention Keel of course, as he is an "unperson" in certain sections of American ufology.

These stories are interesting, but Hopkins's determination to take them as



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being accurate accounts of real physical events results in much absurd theorising and pseudoscientific speculation. One of them concerns the abductee Katharina Wilson who told Hopkins about an occasion when she flew from Portland, Oregon to Chicago to speak at a UFO conference. Two of the organisers of the conference had arranged to meet her at the airport. Although her plane was on time she was about an hour late in meeting the organisers. Hopkins, of course, attributes

this "missing time" to a probable abduction, with the result that the story becomes more convoluted and complicated than the original report. It seems that Wilson started to feel somewhat confused while still on the plane. When she got off she visited the women's toilet near the gate and allegedly had trouble washing her hands. The washbasins had automatic taps operated by sensors, but when she put her hand under them nothing happened, although the other women there had no trouble. She felt panicky and asked a woman: "Am I invisible or something?" The woman did not answer, which she thought very odd, though the most likely explanation is that the woman thought she was crazy.

Two chapters are devoted to discussing this case, one written by Hopkins and the other obviously by his wife who writes: "In looking at Katharina Wilson's troubling, confusing experience at O'Hare Airport, we may speculate about an abduction, or a changeable human energy field, even the possibility of teleportation, although we currently possess a limited knowledge of such subjects." So it seems we can indulge in any sort of fantastic speculation apart from the obvious one that Wilson was suffering from one of her mental fugues which caused her to lose an hour by wandering around aimlessly. This story will cause more sensible readers to wonder, not about a "changeable human energy field" (whatever that might be), but whether Wilson is fit to be allowed out on her own.

As for the taps, Carol Rainey did some research on these devices but probably didn't manage to get details of all the variations on the theme of taps and other plumbing items worked by sensors. She has assumed that the taps in the toilet visited by Katharina Wilson were operated by holding one's hands under them, but I have encountered a design in

which the sensor is let into the tiles above the basin and you have to touch it to turn the tap on. If they were of this type and if Wilson, in her confused state, failed to notice, then this explains the phenomenon. But don't tell Hopkins, as he doesn't like mundane explanations.

We also have the fascinating story of the "phantom support group", which is supported by "four credible witnesses". These witnesses were actually two married couples, and Hopkins interviewed the two men separately and the two women together. Hopkins tells us that the accounts he received agreed with one another but he doesn't give us the separate accounts; we are merely given his interpretation of what he was told. Also, the alleged events had taken place some years previously.

It is said that two ufologists, "Dennis" and "Don" had produced a videotape of their investigation of an abduction case in their area and had presented it at a meeting which was open to the public and was attended by 15 to 20 people. A week later they received a call from a man who said he had been at the meeting, and he invited them to a meeting of his abductee support group.

This was a very odd meeting, in an apartment block, where Dennis, Don and their wives were greeted by "a very strange 'blank-looking', rather short man . . ." The other people present were also described as "blank-looking". The leader of the group berated Don for making the video of the abduction investigation. When questioned he claimed never to have heard of Budd Hopkins or David Jacobs.

One of the strange persons present at the meeting was a "mannequin like female whom they regarded as almost unnaturally beautiful". She suddenly stood up. "As she did so, both men said that she seemed to metamorphose into an incredibly ugly, inhuman-looking creature with large eyes and sparse hair. It was this metamorphosis that triggered their speedy exit from the apartment."

This is all very strange, and very interesting if taken as an example of modern folklore, although Hopkins obviously expects us to believe that the incident really happened as described. However, there are certain details which one would reasonably expect to see included in such a story. Why are we not told the name of the town where the

incident took place? Why is there no mention of any attempt being made to identify the owner of the apartment or the person who rented it on the day of the incident? Who are these keen ufologists who sell videos and hold public meetings but insist on remaining incognito in the story?

We are told that the incident occurred in the "early 1990s", so there has been plenty of time for confabulation, in addition to Hopkins's editing of the accounts into a smoothly written narrative. This would not matter if the authors did not regard this as a description of a real event. They just cannot see how their total rejection of the psychosocial approach to such narratives gives rise to absurd speculations masquerading as scientific theories.

There is much more that could be written about Hopkins's technique of interpreting the weirdest UFO narratives literally, in defiance of basic scientific principles and common sense. No doubt he will respond to criticism of this book as he did with his account of the Napolitano case (*Witnessed*), either by ignoring it, or by indulging in character assassinations of his more persistent critics.

Reviews by Peter Rogerson

Dave Blevins, *UFO Directory International*, McFarland and Co, 2003. £28.00

Whereas the first edition of this directory published 10 years ago was a privately published affair, this edition has been produced by one of the leading publishers of specialist reference books. Another main change is that most of the entries contain e-mail addresses and web sites which were barely a gleam in the early 1990s.

Most entries give name, address, telephone number, e-mail and web sites for the various organisations, and sometimes give publications and date of foundation. Most of the main entries give a synopsis of the group's activities either supplied direct or taken from their website. One omission which can be significant in this field is that the names of the "leaders" of the group are omitted and often have to be worked out from the e-mail address.

It has to be said that there is an awful lot of padding; most of the USA entries are for local branches of MUFON, and similar listing of local branches pads out the Italian section. More serious is the inclusion of the Aetherius Society, which surely is a religious cult and not a UFO organisation of any kind. Perhaps significantly the British section seems to have the largest quota of unverified entries, some of which seem to be the same organisation under various incarnations. The perceptive reader will also find it an amusing game working out which of the UK organisations listed exist primarily in the fertile imagination of Tim Hepple/Mathews.

But at least *Magonia* is listed, which is a rarity in these things.

John F. Moffitt, *Picturing Extraterrestrials: Alien Images in Modern Mass Culture*, Prometheus, 2003

Presented with a book entitled *Picturing Extraterrestrials* written by a retired professor of the history of art, you would probably expect a glossy book full of gorgeous colour illustrations of aliens taken from book and magazine covers, film posters and the whole gamut of modern kitsch. What you get, apart from 16 pages of black and white illustrations, is mountains of text, discussing alien abduction narratives from a generally sceptical viewpoint. Some good points are made, and there are attempts at humour.

There is no doubt that this a wide ranging study; not many UFO books will cover the influence of Swedenborg and Eliphas Levi on symbolist art in the same pages which discuss the genesis of the American cultural icon Betty Crocker (don't worry, fellow Brits, I'm as baffled by this name as you are). The thesis seems to be that the abduction narratives are part of post-modernist commercial culture; they are capitalist commodities, phenomena of the world of TV and other pop kitsch images.

This is interspersed with general sceptical comments on the abduction scene, and UFO history (of course Americocentric, and containing a number of careless howlers). These are often sensible enough but they have been made many times before, and hardly seem the province of the art historian.

The cover describes this book as "accessible", but I am afraid that this

description is somewhat of a terminological inexactitude; reading it was rather like swimming through treacle. With a good, slashing editor, parts would have made interesting *Magonia* articles, but the chapters just don't add up to a coherent book. Why cannot Prometheus Books employ good quality literary editors to make the manuscripts they receive actually readable? The feeling is that anyone wearing an "I Love Randi" badge can walk into the office and get their manuscripts published regardless of literary merit.

Stephen Webb, *If the Universe is Teeming with Aliens, Where is Everybody?: Fifty Solutions to the Fermi Paradox and the Problem of Extraterrestrial Life*, Copernicus and Praxis, 2002. \$27.50

William C Burger, *Perfect Planet, Clever Species, How Unique Are We?* Prometheus Books, 2003

Two books taking a critical look at the claims for extraterrestrial intelligence which will offer little succour to supporters of the ETH. Webb looks at a wide range of explanations for the absence of the ETs or their signals, ranging from the odd to the profound. He examines and largely rejects most of the reasons given as to why ETs might actually exist but wouldn't or couldn't be detected. Instead he sees the absence of their evidence as pretty good evidence for their absence. He argues that this absence is probably due to a variety of factors, acting as a kind of sieve gradually reducing the chances

As I argued in *Magonia*, Webb suggests that the belief in ETs is a kind of arrogance masquerading as humility, the belief that our kind of intelligence and the qualities we value in ourselves have universal significance, and that other animals are somehow failed animals. Aliens will be themselves, products of their own evolutionary histories and not either surrogate or idealised human beings and will not be pursuing human projects.

Burger comes to more or less the same conclusion after his rapid survey of the development of life, humankind and scientific culture on earth. For both authors the road to anthropomorphic, spaceship and telescope building intelligences is littered with too many astronomical, biological and cultural hurdles to be anything but extremely rare.

ODDS AND ENDS

Laughlin laugh-in. Anyone who wonders why the world of science refuses to take ufology seriously has only to glance at the notices announcing UFO conferences. For sheer absurdity they take some beating. The Laughlin conference - 13th International UFO Congress - is to be held from 8 to 14 February. Some of the delights which those attending can look forward to include:

"WYNN FREE & DAVID WILCOCK - Wynn has done the hard research, connecting the dots that show us a very persuasive picture of David Wilcock as 'the reincarnated Edgar Cayce'. David has reluctantly come to accept his past life history as Cayce, and is now ready to advance both his personal karma (and ours) with his new mission." What relevance this might have to UFOs is not stated.

"RICH DOLAN - 'The Greatest Show in the Quadrant' - Humanity's Impending Flame-Out and the Presence of Others: Our global civilization is perched at the brink of collapse. How does the existence of alien intelligence fit in? What might be their perspectives and interests in human civilization's impending flame-out? Anything we can do?" This lecture is followed by the Lunch Break. Shouldn't this be the Out-to-lunch Break?

"WENDELLE STEVENS - Will present the case of Andreas Wiesengrun from Germany, who willingly went aboard an ET ship for 3 days of indoctrination. The 6 species aboard took turns showing him the origin of Earth's humanity, and how we were genetically upgraded to where we are now. They showed him where we are going when we finally mature enough to leave the nest (our planet) and join the sea of humanity freely living forever in space."

Santiago Yturria Garza (Mexico) is going to "present two brand new cases from the UK". However, it seems that no British ufologist is scheduled to present new cases from Mexico.

Also attending this circus will be Budd Hopkins and his wife Carol

Rainey, to plug their book *Sight Unseen*. Hopkins is always moaning about scientists not taking him seriously, but if he persists in attending events where most of the speakers are even crazier than he is, then what can he expect?

Even funnier. Yet another feast of absurdity is promised at a conference to be held in New Jersey on 27 and 28 March, sponsored by The UFO/ET World Traveling Museum and Library of Scientific Anomalies. Speakers and their topics are:

Jaime Maussan - from Mexico, the Top News Investigator of TV "60 minutes" discusses Ongoing Investigations of UFOs & ET News.

Jay Soloman - Contactee from the Pleiades Star System for 11 years in the 1990s discusses his experiences.

Vince DiPietro - From the Goddard Space Flight Center and author of "Unusual Martian Surface Features" shows us more unusual Mars features.

T. Peter Park, PhD discusses Pre-1947 UFO Sightings & CEIIs among other things.

Rosemary Eileen Guiley - discusses Vampires from Outer Space.

Michael Salla, PhD - discusses UFOs & ETs in World Politics.

Tom Van Flanders, PhD - discusses Life on Mars - More Anomalies, Scientific Evidence for Life on Mars.

Anthony & Lynn Volpe - discuss How the Space People Interact With Us & Their Own Experiences.

Any comment would be superfluous.

Off his trolley. Some years ago we published some items in *Magonia* about the mysterious ticket eater who apparently haunted the tramways of western Europe. This was an urban legend, but in recent years some new tramways have been constructed in the British Isles and the bizarre stories concerning them are usually literally true rather than mythical. Like most forms of public transport the trams are subject to the unwelcome attentions



Croydon tram. Irresistible to vandals, troublemakers, and watery-eyed old men who remember the previous Croydon tramway which closed in 1951.

of window-scratchers, graffiti artists, and other vandals and troublemakers. But there seems to be something about trams which makes some of them go to extremes. Here is a good example, from a website conducted by Stephen Parascandolo (<http://www.croydon-tramlink.co.uk>):

"On Friday 7th November, in the morning rush hour, a graffiti artist was hard at work on a tram travelling eastbound from Croydon to Elmers End. The driver was asked to get the culprit to leave the tram at Blackhorse Lane, which eventually took around 5 minutes once he realised the tram wasn't going anywhere and the Police were nearby.

"However, he jumped onto a Croydon bound tram from Beckenham Junction which was packed and pushed his way around trying to graffiti as much as possible. With a major commotion on board, it was decided to take 2548 out of service at East Croydon so the Police could deal with the matter. Having unloaded the tram at East Croydon, the culprit was still hard at work when the Police arrived. They then had their work cut out as he went berserk whilst on the floor being handcuffed and once in the Police van tried his hardest to turn it over by rocking it from side to side."

Tiger woman.

Fifty people were arrested in Qom, India, as police broke up a crowd that had assembled to watch the rumoured execution of a half-woman, half tigress, on 9 November. Police told the crowd the rumour was false, but they smashed windows in several buildings as they attempted to disperse them. (*The Daily Telegraph*, 10

November 2003)

The husband in the bathroom.

A Turkish woman locked her rich husband naked in the bathroom for three years, claiming that he was mentally disturbed, according to the newspaper *Hurriyet* on 10 November.

Orhan Babacutu, aged 41, was found traumatised, sitting on the shower tiles next to the lavatory, with a bowl on the floor for his food. His wife, Kevser, faces criminal charges. Mr Babacutu said: "Her goal was to make me sick so that I die and she inherits my fortune." He was freed after his mother called the police. (*The Daily Telegraph*, 11 November 2003)

The case of the cuddly goose.

When Van Thinh Le, from Vietnam, appeared before Barkingside magistrates, charged with causing unnecessary suffering to a wild animal, a Canada goose, Mark Jones, prosecuting for the RSPCA, said that Thinh Le was caught with the goose under his jacket in Wanstead Park, London. "The defendant opened his coat and the goose fell.

"It lay motionless for some time before it was able to make its way to the water. Mr Le said, 'I like to cuddle



Canada Goose on the Thames. Do not cuddle.

these animals. I didn't realise this was against the law.' The concern of the RSPCA is the reality that this bird was being taken for the pot."

In mitigation, Robert Rye, defending Mr Le, said that goose cuddling was a Vietnamese custom, and the birds were not taken for the pot. Having pleaded guilty, Mr Le was told to pay £400 costs and given a two-year conditional discharge. The presiding magistrate warned him not to try cuddling geese again.

Enquiries to the Vietnamese Embassy in London failed to elicit any comments. (David Sapstead, 'Goose cuddle is a flight of fancy', *The Daily Telegraph*, 5 December 2003)

MAGONIA Readers' Meetings

First Sunday of each month, 1915-2230, at the Railway, Putney, opposite Putney station (South West Trains) and about 10 minutes' walk from East Putney station (District Line)

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